

Pocahontas Trail Federal Funding Announcement (August 3, 2005)

I am pleased today to join with residents of the Town of Pocahontas and officials from Historic Pocahontas, Inc. in announcing a major award of federal funding to support new tourism development in the Town.

In the Town of Pocahontas, we have a rare opportunity to encourage new tourism development.

Pocahontas was the first and largest coal mining town in the Virginia Coalfields. Since the closing of the mine in 1955, many of the historical buildings erected during the height of the coal mining industry have remained, maintaining the feel of a coal mining town from the turn of the last century. While many of the structures are in need of renovation, the historical character of the Town persists, and the influence of the coal mining industry in the early development of Pocahontas can still be felt. The Town is the embodiment of the coal mining industry's early days, and it is appropriate that we make every effort to preserve its unique character.

To that end, we are making tremendous strides. Last December, we gathered in this building to celebrate the completion of work to replace the roofs of the Pocahontas Opera House and City Hall and the Pocahontas Exhibition Mine. The roof replacements were made possible through the allocation of \$68,000 in federal funds which I obtained.

I also had the opportunity at that time to announce the donation of a portion of rail line to Historic Pocahontas from Norfolk Southern. After many years of combined federal, state and local effort, Norfolk Southern agreed to donate a 1.8 mile portion of rail line which extends from the Town of Pocahontas to Blue Stone Junction in Mercer County, West Virginia. In addition to the rail line, the rail yard and the old train station were also donated by the company.

At the time of that announcement, I provided information to those gathered regarding my efforts to obtain federal funding to enable the development of a new walking and riding trail adjacent to the 1.8 mile portion of rail line. Today, I am pleased to report on the success of those efforts.

On Friday of last week, the Congress at my request appropriated \$400,000 in federal funding for the development and construction of the Pocahontas Trail. The federal funding represents another success in our efforts to transform Pocahontas into a major tourist attraction.

Much more work remains to be done to completely revitalize the Town of Pocahontas and to enable the Town to reach its full potential. To that end, I have convened an interagency task force comprised of federal, state and local governments to study the many possibilities for the restoration of the old buildings in Pocahontas and the promotion of the Town as a major tourist destination. The members of the task force have been meeting since the beginning of this year, and I would

like to take this opportunity to report on the progress we are making.

- Historic Pocahontas has requested an allocation of federal funding to enable the stabilization and renovation of the Company Store. I am currently working to secure approval for that funding and hope to announce the approval of our request later this summer.
 - Plans are being developed through a private contractor for the rehabilitation of the train station into a retail location for homemade crafts. The development of such a location would further encourage tourism growth in Pocahontas.
 - I am currently exploring federal funding opportunities for the stabilization and renovation of the Pocahontas Fire Station.
- Rental income from leased space in the Fuel Company building is being used for repairs needed at the building. The funds have also been used to hire a part-time secretary for Historic Pocahontas, and the organization hopes to soon hire an Executive Director to oversee the organization's projects.

I would now like to recognize and thank several individuals who are instrumental to the work we are performing in the Town of Pocahontas.

I want to express my great appreciation to Tom Childress, Chairman of the Virginia Tourist Train Authority and Tom Brewster, President of Historic Pocahontas, Inc., for the tremendous leadership they have shown in our efforts to encourage tourism in the Town of Pocahontas. Their work has been vital to these projects, and I thank them for the dedication they have shown to this community.

I also want to thank the leaders of the Town of Pocahontas and Tazewell County, including Pocahontas Mayor Anita Brown, the Pocahontas Town Council and the members of the Tazewell County Board of Supervisors for their strong support of the Pocahontas Tourism projects.

The Pocahontas Tourism Task Force which I formed earlier this year is also providing significant contributions to the development of tourism in Pocahontas. I thank them for their efforts in working with the Town and with Historic Pocahontas.

Finally, I would like to thank my District Director, Laura Lee. Laura has dedicated countless hours in working with the various actors involved in Pocahontas' tourism development, and the successes we are seeing here is due, in part, to her hard work.

Tourism development holds great promise for the Town of Pocahontas, and I am very pleased that the Congress has honored my request to enable the development of the rail line property. Today's celebration marks another step in encouraging tourism growth in this community and in preserving the rich cultural history of our region. I thank everyone here today for the contributions that have been made to support the development of the Town of Pocahontas, and I look

forward to many future successes for this community.